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With a new chairman of the Joint Chiefs on the way, as well as leadership changes at the Central Intelligence Agency and Department of Defense, the U.S. combat mission in Afghanistan is expected to continue as it has for the last decade.

Without measurable progress to show, the case for sustained involvement, particularly at current troop levels, is becoming harder to make. There are certainly advancements to build upon, but there is no telling how much longer support will last, to continue the mission as it stands now.

A more favorable strategy might entail moving away from a sizable ground combat force and relying more on special operations. The coalition would still be intact. The major difference would be in the number of personnel moving from village to village, defending near-impenetrable mountain passes or patrolling terrain that is almost impossible to navigate.

Of course, a far more drastic option is the complete withdrawal of U.S. forces. It's a move that would have disastrous consequences, for the region and global security.

For me, both as a Marine who served in Afghanistan and a member of Congress, most frustrating is that victory remains within reach. It has been that way for some time. But standing in the way are factors far beyond the control of the military men and women undertaking this mission.

One of these challenges comes in the form of unreliable Afghan leadership. The country's government, from its president downward, seems more interested in upholding a corrupt political system than achieving real progress. In no way is this attributable to our military or any of the civilians working the country's diplomatic channels. This is an inherent problem that only the Afghans can resolve, assuming the right amount of pressure and encouragement is provided.

Militarily, the roadside bomb threat remains a significant problem. It's still the single largest source of U.S. casualties. Soldiers and Marines are suffering serious injury, if not losing their lives, from roadside bomb blasts targeting them while they are in vehicles or on foot patrols. Only recently have additional steps been taken to address this threat.

Even so, more needs to be done to incorporate new counter-roadside bomb technology ---- and it needs to happen fast. Otherwise, roadside bombs will keep driving a wedge between our military and its objectives.

This also happens to fit right into the Obama administration's other shortcomings in Afghanistan, from the duration of time that elapsed until a decision was made on the surge strategy to mixed messages that have been sent about our commitment to leaving only when the time is right. Take for instance the president's pronounced drawdown date, subsequent transition plans, detainee policy or rules of engagement binding the hands of American troops. There is an obvious lack of clarity on these points.

There's still time to make necessary gains in Afghanistan but the window of opportunity is closing. The Obama administration needs to renew its focus, define the parameters for success and stop echoing a misshapen worldview that is creating so much uncertainty.